DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 097 682 CS 201 589

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TITLE A Progress Report on Agenda-Setting Research.
PUB DATE Aug 74
NOTE 61p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (57th, San Diego, California, August 18-21, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$3.15 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Changing Attitudes; *Journalism; *Mass Media; *Media Research; Political Attitudes; *Press Opinion; Program Content; Social Behavior
IDENTIFIERS *Agenda Setting

ABSTRACT

Although empirical research on the agenda-setting function of mass communication dates only from the 1968 presidential election, historically there has been long-standing concern over the control of communication because of its assumed influence. Early communication research shared this concern and assumption, focusing on the ability of the media to change attitudes. While little attitude change was found, these studies did find substantial communication impact on cognitions. It is this cognitive impact of mass media--the ability of the mass media to shape our map of the world, to determine the priority of items on our personal agendas of issues--that agenda-setting research has been exploring in recent years. Agenda-setting research will explore the following areas in the immediate future: the causal link between media coverage and individual cognitions; establishing the contingent conditions affecting learning from mass communication; measuring and conceptualizing the difference in interpersonal and intrapersonal agendas; exploring the behavioral implications of agenda-setting, and extending the concept of agenda-setting to domains other than political behavior. (Author)

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A PROGRESS REPORT ON AGENDA-SETTING RESEARCH

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Association for Education in Journalism, Theory & Methodology Division. San Diego, California. August 18-21, 1974.

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In the popular view mass communication exerts tremendous influence over us. The ability of television, newspapers, movies, radio, and film to mold the public mind and significantly influence the flow of history is a widely ascribed power.

While behavioral scientists have not discovered that media have all the power ascribed to them by popular conventional wisdom, they recently are finding considerable evidence that editors and broadcasters play an important part in shaping our social reality as they go about their day-to-day task of choosing and displaying news. Audiences not only learn about public issues and other matters through the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis placed on it by the mass media. For example, in reflecting what candidates are saying during a campaign, the mass media apparently determine the important issues. In other words, the media set the "agenda" of the campaign.

This impact of mass media — the ability to effect cognitive change among individuals — has been labeled the agenda-setting function of mass communication. Here may lie the most important effect of modern mass communication, the ability of media to structure our world for us. As American political scientist Bernard Cohen (1963, p. 13) has summarized it, the mass media may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but media are stunningly successful in telling their audiences what to think about.

I. Agenda-Setting, the Historical Perspective

While study of the agenda-setting power of the press is becoming

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the focus of contemporary research, governments long have been concerned with the mechanisms of control of public thought. Hitler is only one of the most recent, and more notorious, examples of a national leader who believed that repetition of the same "truth" over and over again would result in adoption of that belief by mass publics (Hitler, 1939). By implication, he argued that placing an item high on the "agenda" would result in change in beliefs and, presumably, adjustments in actual behavior. This model of course is familiar: public information → public learning → belief change → behavioral change. In this apparent belief, Hitler scarcely has stood alone.

Every American president up to Abraham Lincoln in 1861 sought to make sure that he had "his" sympathetic newspaper nearby in which he could feed information or control the coverage of his office. In office, Lincoln broke tradition by depending on no particular newspaper and, instead, relied heavily upon the nascent Associated Press (Emery, 1972, pp. 284 ff.). His perspective was national.

Even so, these early American presidents, like those of the 20th century, have without exception sparred with the press sometime during their administrations in order to control as best they could what and how information about their administrations is reported (Pollard, 1947). What leader of whatever governmental system would not attempt to control the information about his government? Control of information, such leaders long ago shrewdly recognized, is influence over the public, or an important ingredient of such control.

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The Response to Growth of the Mass Press

Parallel to the rise of complex mass media systems has arisen concern about the effects of mediated communication on the increasingly large mass audiences of the 20th century. This is particularly striking in the United States. In the late 19th century, the antics of William Randolph Hearst and his New York Journal versus those of Joseph Pulitzer and his New York World sent circulations skyrocketing above a million a day, splashed America's major city in a dazzling yellow from the cartoons, and in 1898 helped send (along with a sympathetic public opinion) the United States spinning into the short Spanish-American War. (See Wilkerson, 1932; and Wisan, 1934) In the view of many big newspaper publishers — certainly in the view of Hearst and Pulitzer — the press had enormous day-to-day influence on the public. Had not the Journal and World sent a nation to war by constantly playing up Spanish "atrocity" news day after day?

That the public agreed with these publishers was not surprising. Along with the experience of watching mass newspapers before their eyes, they were exposed to a new behavioral science absorbed in the findings of the great Russian scientist Ivan Pavlov and others who were building a strong stimulus-response basis beneath learning theory. It was not difficult to draw an important conclusion from these two developments: a mass press must have mass effects.

A stimulus has a response. For those speculating on the effects of media on what was regarded as a large, atomized and unsophisticated audience, the result was the beginning of what has been called the "hypodermic theory" of the press, a theory (likely) still quite current

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today among many in the general public (DeFleur, 1970, pp. 118-120). Implicit was the assumption that display of information in the press has important one-way effects on what people learn and the kinds of public attitudes they develop and share. It was a 1984 view.

In Western society understanding these effects has become vitally important as public opinion has steadily grown as a potent force in shaping governmental policies. The 19th and 20th centuries, if nothing else, demonstrate powerful forces leading toward democratization of the political processes. (See Blum et al., 1970). For many years, nearly two centuries, the people have spoken out, violently on occasion.

Now they are being heard. Rebellion in the streets soon is translated into programs translated by the public media. And presumably these media also strongly influence the people. Ironically, one United States study has suggested that political leaders view the press and say, "There are the people speaking." Conversely, the general readers are saying, "There are the leaders speaking." (See Cohen, 1963). All are perceived as speaking; who is listening?

Some Observations about Influences on the News Process

Walter Lippmann drew insightful attention to this concern about media power with the 1922 publication of Public Opinion. He coined the phrase "stereotyping" as a shorthand way of describing how the media transfer pictures of the world into our heads (Lippmann, 1922, Part III). Those pictures, which he argued have a distressing way of becoming fixed in our belief patterns, (are) the only way we often have of

learning much about the world beyond our communities. Media have as yet undetermined power to determine what we think, but clearer power to sketch in what we will think about. Beyond what we know about our own family and friends and our own communities, the media agenda also is our agenda regardless of our attitudes toward the topics discussed from day to day. What alternative have we?

Growing recognition of this has caused concerned journalists, citizens, and scholars of Western nations to ask who controls what media will highlight (or ignore) from day to day? Who <u>really</u> sets the public agenda? For the American press system, historically rooted in capitalistic development, the answer to this question is complex. Depending upon where they have looked, researchers have discovered evidence that the news and editorial output is influenced by publishers (Breed, 1955), available technological means (see Lee, 1937, and Shaw, 1967), economic influences (McCombs, 1972), press philosophies (Siebert <u>et al</u>., 1956), political constraints (Reston, 1967, and Rivers, 1970), professional norms (McLeod and Hawley, 1964), "newsmakers" themselves (see White, 1950), and by interests of the audience (see McCombs, 1972).

While from the point of view of the Soviet Union, such constraints on the agenda-making process may look as if they could be subsumed under a single reason — control by the capitalist economic system — this point of view scarcely explains the complexity of news choice to those familiar with the historical development of the Western press.

United States press history is replete with newspapers, such as

the abolitionist press of the 19th century and "underground" press of the 1960s, which stood against the prevailing capitalist norms and, in most cases, paid with their lives (see Bryan, 1969). This chapter of history cannot be explained by American capitalistic development but by a strong journalistic effort to say something of significance, to have an influence on the agenda of public issues and hopefully on public thought and action.

Even in Russia, one study recently has shown, the educated rapidly skim the party press — to absorb the party "agenda"; their survival (in party terms) may depend on this — while those less informed read the substance of all the stories right down to, and through, the "fillers" (Rogers, 1968). Perhaps these less educated readers do not perceive what the party or government is <u>really</u> saying.

It is however the future as well as the past which concerns us. By 1985, cable television is predicted to reach 85% of American homes (Parker, 1973). With many channels from which to choose information, will the effect be fragmentation of a significant portion of the mass audience as viewers turn to one of the many channels available to provide an agenda of news and entertainment individually pleasing to them? Perhaps Walter Cronkite will be lost in the shuffle, perhaps not; no one knows precisely what to expect (see Bagdikian, 1971).

The communications industry itself clearly is worried about the future possibilities of such enlarged consumer choice in selecting individual agenda (Doan, 1971). Likewise others wonder about the influence on the preservation of strong <u>national spirit</u> to which the

media commonly are assumed greatly to contribute through their constant focus on common national stimuli (see Lee, 1937). Will we be fragmented as a people?

Or, conversely, will we be "internationalized"? The concern about loss of nationalistic loyalty is heightened by those observing the international possibilities created by the technologies of the 1950s through early 1970s, years which have seen communication satellites hurled into the skies and the potential for country-to-country communication, even people-to-people communication, greatly enlarged. UNESCO pointed out in 1963:

> Space communication is likely to have unpredictable and ultimately astonishing effects on person-to-person communication generally. For example, it may accelerate the growing tendency of our time to develop contact between people from different countries for the discussion and solution of common problems and the exchange of information. (Reported in Davison, 1973, p. 882)

Are we on the edge of a communications system which, far from fragmenting us by allowing us to choose our individual media programs and perhaps eroding our deep national attachments, can actually establish for us a world "agenda" of issues and concerns? One United States study shows that local issues steadily have decreased in importance as compared with national issues in presidential elections since the late 19th century — a period, incidentally, in which the economic conditions for major American media consolidation were

established (see Campbell and Converse, 1972, p. 268; and Nixon and Ward, 1961). Is 1984, after all, emerging?

Clearly the technology is here even though the level of international understanding and control isn't yet, not to mention the problem of deciding who would determine the day-to-day content of such international media voices. All would want control. The challenge of understanding this intricate process of how we as individuals and members of groups really learn from the enormous outpouring of contemporary media systems never has been more pressing. The race is not merely with a nearly out-of-control technology which may deliver world news by the end of the next half century but to cope with those who inevitably will attempt to seize and control the mechanisms of mass information delivery. All thoughtful men and women recognize that in the future, as in the past, control over the media delivered public agenda of issues somehow is control over individual concerns and thinking. But exactly how?

Influences on Early Behavioral Science

The view of Pulitzer and Hearst that mass newspapers and magazines had great power to shape opinions and attitudes was shared by early behavioral scientists as much as by the general public. Both Allied and Central powers made heavy use of propaganda in World War I and in the subsequent two decades a whole literature was spawned by the new "field" of public relations which promised it could do such feats as "engineer" public consent on issues (See Bernays, 1928). Little wonder that behavioral scientists turned first to this question:

what effects do mass media have in shaping attitudes?

Had the media led the United States into a war in distant Europe as many believed it had propelled the country into the Spanish-American War? Had war profiteers in some way controlled the press coverage of the growing dark cloud in Europe? And, World War I showed clearly, propaganda could be easily manipulated for national ends; where were all those Belgian babies who were bayoneted by invading Germans? Mostly, it turned out after the war, in their cribs asleep (See Emery, 1972). Clearly information could be used for, or against, you with telling effect.

Some Early Studies

Generally speaking studies of learning can be divided into those which have focused on the stimulus variations (in communications studies, such as varying the "credibility" of the source or the placement or size of a headline) or response factors (such as attitudes, opinions, or recognitions located inside the individual) (Proshansky and Siedenberg, 1965, p. 21). Reflecting a stimulus-response orientation, much of the early significant work in behavioral science concentrated on effects of communications on attitudes. While numerous early studies found some attitude change, usually in a laboratory situation, the clearest trend was that attitudes are very resistant to change (see Proshansky and Seidenberg, 1965, pp. 95-230).

The most important early "modern" study of American voters showed they almost would rather cut off an arm than change their

minds about their voting choice during an important presidential election (Lazarsfeld, et al., 1948). Our attitudes, it has turned out, are relatively stable, not tumbleweeds blowing in the daily wind of mass media. They help define us as individuals by subsuming our unique feelings, and studies have found people either resist direct challenges to attitudes or "interpret" conflicting information in such a way as to make it compatible with pre-existing beliefs (See Festinger, 1957).

The end result of this early heavy focus on attitudes was summarized by Joseph Klapper in 1960 in a well-known quote:

> Mass communication ordinarily does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences (1960, p. 8).

Such a conclusion suggests media effects are so heavily mediated through the social setting in which messages are received and evaluated that media really have little or no direct effects on us at all. In the 1950s among some behavioral scientists, the conventional wisdom that media have massive effects was set aside for a new piece of conventional wisdom: the media have no effects.

This narrow view of media effects is reflected in the so-called "law of minimal consequences" view of a press which has anything but the awesome power to shape attitudes suspected only 40 years before. With such a view, does it particularly matter what makes up the agenda of media from day to day? Yes, it does.

Most likely, some behavioral scientists overreacted after efforts to locate communication factors related to attitude

change resulted in the discovery that attitudes simply resist direct challenge. Their focus, of course, was on attitudinal change, not informational learning. Yet in news coverage, modern mass media do not consciously attempt to shape day-to-day attitudes but rather to inform their diverse audiences about events. The job of a good newsperson is to convey some sense of the reality of events for the audience, to create the "pictures" in our heads about which Walter Lippmann wrote in 1922. The question really is: how successful are the media in informing people — what do they learn? — rather than how their attitudes have been changed or shaped.

Audience Involvement

Certainly audiences collectively spend enormous amounts of time with media, in American about 2½ hours a day with television and another one-half hour with newspapers. This does not count time spent listening to radio, reading magazines or books or attending movies. And as surely as the general public of the early 20th century believed the mass press could shape attitudes, today that audience suspects we are learning from our heavy media exposure.

Canadian scholar Marshall McLuhan achieved worldwide fame in the 1950s and 1960s with studies which argued that heavy exposure to "cool" media, especially television, is changing our very perceptions of ourselves and recreating some of the conditions of a tribal society which depended on an oral literary tradition (see McLuhan, 1964; also Carey, 1967). In a sense, he argues, the warm family-oriented society

in which grandfather hands down story to grandson is being extended worldwide as we, in the television age, begin to feel a new kinship with each other regardless of where we are from. We identify in demographic as well as national ways. The young of France, America, and Japan have a sense of sharing something; they are young. We do, after all, have something in common with the "underdeveloped" nations of the world; we all are becoming one big tribe. Perhaps that's why we squabble so much.

Another Canadian scholar, Harold Innis, perhaps more profoundly, has argued that communication technologies importantly influence the limits of political power. A powerful country with a powerful communication technology can do much. Citing the rich materials of Western history, he pointed out that Roman legions in the field were as responsive to Rome as allowed by the relatively easy communication means of that day. How flexible would an army be if one had to chisel orders on stone ... and then transport them? (See Innis, 1951)

Innis deeply influenced McLuhan and both scholars are nearly unique in recent history in placing communication technologies and effects in a central role in human history. In a sense they constitute a kind of Arnold Toynbee for communications history. In terms of agenda-setting, Innis' studies suggest the importance of studying the ability of a nation with powerful communication means to extend that power — in ideas and values if not force of arms — around the world. For example, are American media imposing a cultural imperialism over such parts of the world as Canada and Latin America? What

is really learned abroad from seeing an "agenda" of issues created for an American audience?

At less than a cultural level, many charge that the media have encouraged our children to be violent, have lessened the force of home and church as centers for child guidance, have created a sense of "relative deprivation" among the poor viewing advertising (and sent thousands into the streets to get "theirs"), and have contributed to an erosion of the moral fabric which for so long made America a "city on the hill" in the view of many both in Europe and America (see National Institute, 1972). After all where so much news is bad is the messenger not partly responsible? Somehow all this involves more than attitudes. It involves our basic interface with the larger human environment.

Even many classic behavioral studies which found little attitude change found that people learned from the messages to which they were exposed. When Hovland and Weiss (1952) studied the influence of source credibility on communication effectiveness, they found it did indeed make a difference in acceptance of a message if the subjects judged the source of the message as "trustworthy" or not, but "neither the acquisition nor the retention of factual information" was affected by (any) judgments of a source's qualifications. Subjects learned equally well regardless of condition.

Likewise the famous study of the effects of fear appeals on tooth brushing showed that you apparently can argue too strongly in trying to shape an attitude and change behavior (Janis and Feshbach, 1953). People avoid the implications of a really fearful message.

Even that study, however, showed that respondents learned and retained about the same amount of information regardless of the amount of fear appeal injected into the message.

People can learn without their attitudes necessarily being changed. These early behavioral science studies really should be reviewed from the point of view of discovering the conditions which affect learning as well as those which affect attitude or behavioral change. From the point of view of agenda-setting, we may well have thrown out the baby of learning with the bathwater of attitude change.

That the media daily pours out volumes of messages of all kinds is manifest. Also clear is the common assumption among political leaders and others with a stake in public opinion (which nowadays is nearly everyone) that the media agenda is vitally connected with public power. Theodore White, in The Making of the President 1972, aptly summarizes the popular views of this media power.

> What lay at issue in 1972 between Richard Nixon, on the one hand, and the adversary press and media of America, on the other, was simple: it was power.
>
> The power of the press in America is a primordial one. It sets the agenda of public discussion; and this sweeping political power is unrestrained by any law. It determines what people will talk and think about — an authority that in other nations is reserved for tyrants, priests, parties and mandarins.

> No major act of the American Congress, no foreign adventure, no act of diplomacy, no great social reform can succeed in the United States unless the press prepares the public mind. And when the press seizes a great issue to thrust onto the agenda of talk, it moves action on its own — the cause of the environment, the cause of civil rights, the liquidation of the war in Vietnam, and, as climax, the Watergate affair were all set on the agenda, in first instance, by press (p. 327).

Clearly, however, it is more and less than this. What is learned from day-to-day media agenda and by whom? What are the effects of differences in major versus minor news emphasis — varying the stimulus as the psychologist might say? No one knows in detail but recently behavioral scientists have begun tentatively to make explicit questions we should be asking and to systematize the answers we so far have.

II. Agenda-Setting in the Literature

As attention to the concept of agenda-setting grows within communication science, an overview is needed to maintain perspective. This perspective at present involves two major components: the reinterpretation of existing mass communications research in light of the agenda-setting concept and a discussion of new questions and directions for agenda-setting research.

The General Literature

The utility of agenda-setting to the interpretation of mass communication research can best be examined under the broader question of how people learn from the mass media. From the traditional stimulus-response viewpoint, mass media content is a large stimulus package composed of multiple, competing stimuli — a conglomeration of messages.

This conglomeration raises such questions as: To which of the stimuli do people attend? What is actually learned? How do audiences sort out and conceptualize the content? Which aspects actually are absorbed in behavior patterns? A person potentially may be exposed to all of a newspaper, but all is not really absorbed because the paper normally is skimmed, not read. This also occurs with television news; the news moves past like a parade and we can ponder what we like.

The original hypothesis for agenda-setting research was that media emphasis on an event influences the audience also to see the event as important. Selection of news from the total possibilities of the environment gives great emphasis to the events actually covered. But agenda-setting is not limited to news content or even mass communications. It can be extended to all media content and across the entire communications spectrum.

Some evidence has revealed that extensive television viewing results in a higher mis-perception of the crime rate — perhaps gleaned from the numerous television plots dealing with crime. Estimates of the true crime rate, and particularly its

over-estimation, results from an agenda-setting function of television. It is not the intentional policy of the networks to promote this phenomenon, if such a phenomenon indeed exists generally; rather it is an outgrowth of the nature of the medium and its particular set of content selection values.

Some data from a 1972 study of Charlotte, N.C., suggest that media presentations of crime news become routine to audiences. People's agenda seem to follow the agenda of social issue stories rather than an agenda of specific criminal incident stories. But these specific individual crimes may become combined into an overall sense of a vaguely defined problem. Individual readers may be translating news into social issues; they are learning a media-delivered social reality.

Another recent study found children's knowledge of occupations related to mass media portrayal. DeFleur and DeFleur tested children's knowledge of media emphasized and non-emphasized occupations (DeFleur and DeFleur, 1967). An agenda-setting view of this research suggests that in addition to measuring the factual learning of definitions, one should inquire whether perception of the number of people in an occupation, perception of the occupation's "social worth", and personal preference for an occupation are related to its presentation (or non-presentation) in the media. Is the world <u>really</u> full of lawyers, doctors, detectives, and of course American cowboys? And would such perceptions by children have an influence on career choices?

Another study suggests that views of American minority groups are deeply influenced by television when one doesn't normally see those

groups in everyday life. For those who do not see Blacks, for example, the Blacks on television become a picture of a racial minority in a very real sense. For those who do see Blacks, of course, the impact of television is not so great. In short, with nothing competing from your own experience, media experience becomes real (see Dervin and Greenberg, 1972).

Consider the implications of this study for Western society increasingly isolated by economics into inter-city and suburbs, high-rent districts and slums. What indeed are we learning about each other? (One American scholar, apparently profoundly discouraged, has argued that we often have used media experience in lieu of real contact with each other (See Wiebe, 1973). The essence of his argument is this: we rush by without helping each other in the cities because we are going home to visit with our personal friends, such as Johnny Carson.

Many journalism studies of the past two decades contain implicit assumptions of agenda-setting in their design. Typical content analysis of the flow of foreign news examines types and amounts of news from each country presented in U.S. papers and relate the findings, usually speculatively, to the image of that country in the minds of American readers. Many such studies are reported in Journalism Quarterly and Public Opinion Quarterly. This is largely a descriptive literature with little attempt at actual evaluation of news impact. Generally unexplained is whether or not these stereotypes really make any difference.

Stereotyping itself can be conceptualized in agenda-setting terms. By providing a stereotype, the communicator is teaching — or at least the audience is learning — a set of saliences of

particular attributes to his audience, so that in later references, all he needs to do is to supply the labels, and his audience will fill in the pictures (the agenda of attributes) themselves.

The ability of the mass media to proliferate images has also been assumed in political image-making, and there is a vast new literature which deals mostly with technique and is a modern version of press agentry. While few anymore believe they can "engineer" public consent, it is commonly assumed that mass media, especially television, can increase the salience of candidate attributes in the public mind. Smart political leaders know they are not speaking to the audience before them but to the audience at the end of the television camera or reporters' notebooks (see McGinniss, 1969). They no longer make the mistake of Adlai Stevenson in running for President in 1952 in polishing up his addresses to the last minute for the audience to whom he directly was speaking. He missed the point, too late it turned out (Barnouw, 1968, pp. 298-99).

Another example of the assumption of agenda-setting occurs in newspaper editorial campaigns. By publishing a special series of articles on some topic or issue the press traditionally has sought to influence public opinion by raising the salience of the topic or issue among its readers.

Through all of these manifestations of agenda-setting is the same basic assumption: increased salience of an issue has an impact on public opinion. This assumption is not proof; it is simply a potential explanation. The role of theory is to make explicit the implicit. In agenda-setting, we are not talking of great leaps but

of small steps in extending existing knowledge.

The value of theory, or at least a concept with theoretical potential, becomes visible when we re-examine the gate-keeping studies of Kurt Lewin and the later related studies, chiefly involving wire news editors, that examined what influences the agenda of gate-keepers (Lewin, 1947; White, 1950). New questions arise: do local media set their own agendas or are they acting as a conduit, passing on agendas set by a) the news sources and b) the wire services?

Agenda-setting suggests examining the socialization of the wire editor in the profession of news-gathering. Wire editors tend to look to larger newspapers which in turn are looking to the wire services to see what news is being played and how. Who is in charge? Existing studies tend to emphasize the intrapersonal aspect of the operations of wire service editors. But agenda-setting suggests a broader, integrative perspective for gate-keeping research.

Recent Agenda-setting Studies

Recently there have been several attempts to empirically verify the observations of Lippmann, Cohen, and others that the media do indeed structure our cognitive world for us in vitally important ways. These studies directly focused on the agenda-setting function.

In the 1968 Presidential election McCombs and Shaw took an initial step toward empirical verification of the agenda-setting function of the mass media (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Their comparisons of aggregate data from undecided voters with aggregate descriptions

of media content available to those voters yielded high correlations between what voters considered important issues and the issues emphasized in the news media. In short, the aggregate agenda of the voters was highly similar to the agenda of issues suggested by the news media. A later study suggests that media advertising also has considerable power to influence the attributes of candidates judged important by voters (Shaw and Bowers, 1972).

The question is frequently raised whether the media <u>really</u> set the agenda, or whether they simply reflect an agenda set by their news sources. Funkhouser's study of the issues of the 1960s — as reflected in both public opinion polls and media coverage — demonstrates the power of the media to establish an agenda that is not isomorphic to the "real world" of news events (Funkhouser, 1973). While there is a high correlation (+.78) between media coverage and what people told Gallup the important problems were, there is considerable lag between both these variables and the peaks of the "objective indicators" for each of the problems studied. For example, coverage of (and public concern over) the Vietnam War, campus unrest, and urban riots peaked a year or two earlier than did the actual situations themselves.

Now agenda-setting asserts not only a positive relationship between what the media emphasize and what voters come to regard as important. It regards this as an inevitable by-product of the normal flow of news. Each day the gate-keepers in news media systems must decide which items to pass and which to reject. Furthermore, the items passed through the gate are not treated equally when presented to the audience. Some are used at length, others severely cut (or

eliminated). Some are leadoff items on a newscast. Others follow deep in. Newspapers clearly state their assessment of the salience of an item thrcugh headline size and placement with the newspaper — anywhere from the lead item on page one to the bottom of a column on page 66.

Agenda-stting asserts that audiences learn these saliences from the news media, incorporating a similar set of weights into their personal agendas. While the production of these saliences is largely a by-product of journalism practice and tradition, they nevertheless are attributes of the messages transmitted to the audience. And, asserts the idea of agenda-setting, they are among the most important message attributes transmitted to the audience.

This concept of the agenda-setting function of the mass media is a relational concept specifying a strong positive relationship between the emphases of mass media coverage and the salience of these topics to the individuals in the audience. This concept is stated in causal terms: increased salience of a topic or issue in the mass media influences (causes) the salience of that topic or issue among the public. This is the long-standing basic assumption of quantitative content analysis spelled out in terms of audience cognitions and behavior.

But, as we have noted, agenda-setting as a concept is not limited to the correspondence between saliences of topics for the media and its audience. We can also consider the saliency of various attributes of these objects (topics, issues, persons, or whatever) reported in the media. To what extent is our view of an object shaped or influenced by the picture sketched in the media, especially by those attributes which the media deem newsworthy? Paletz et al. (1971) have argued, for example, that our views of city councils as institutions are directly influenced by press reporting with the result that these local governing groups are perceived to have more expertise and authority than in reality they possess.

Consideration of agenda-setting in terms of the corresponding saliences of both topics and attributes allows the concept of agenda-setting to subsume similar ideas presented in the past. The concepts of status-conferral, stereotyping, and image-making all deal with the salience of objects or attributes. And research on all three have linked these manipulations of salience to the mass media.

Status-conferral, the basic notion of press agentry in the Hollywood sense, describes the ability of the media to influence the salience — prominence — of an individual (object) in the public eye.

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On the other hand, the concept of stereotyping concerns the salience of attributes. (All Scots are thrifty! All Frenchmen are romantic!) Stereotyping has been criticized as invalid characterization of objects because of its over-emphasis on a few selected traits. And the media repeatedly have been criticized for their perpetuation of stereotypes, most recently of female roles in our society.

The concept of image-making, now part of our political campaign jargon covers the manipulation of the salience of both objects and attributes. A political image-maker is concerned with increasing public familiarity with his candidate (status-conferral) and/or increasing the salience of certain candidate attributes.

In all cases, we are dealing with the basic question of agenda-setting research: how does press coverage influence our perception of objects and their attributes.

III. Strategies for Future Research

Out of these initial studies of agenda-setting come the outlines of five directions for future research:

(1) Precision attempts to test the causal assertions of agenda-setting that media agendas $\longrightarrow$ personal agendas.

(2) Specifying the conditions under which agenda-setting operates.

No one would really contend that agenda-setting is an influence process operating at all times and all places on all people. If the agenda-setting influence were that universal, American housewives would talk about little but the brightness of the

(3) Refining the conceptualization and measurement of personal agendas.

(4) Extending the domain of agenda-setting beyond political issues and public opinion. Much of the existing research literature on mass communications can be reinterpreted in agenda-setting terms to yield new insights and research hypotheses.

(5) Exploring the behavioral implications of agenda-setting among audiences. From a journalistic perspective, the study of news values (saliences) is self-sufficient. But what are the social consequences of communicating these news values to the public?

Evidence for Causality

The concept of agenda-setting asserts that media content sets personal agendas. In other words, the media are regarded as the cause of certain audience beliefs and behavior. However, most of the evidence to date for agenda-setting has been based on static correlations. While the consistent high correlations between media content and personal agendas are encouraging and supportive of the concept, stronger evidence taking into account the actual direction of effect is needed.

There is, of course, a viable alternative view of the relationship between the press and society. Rather than functioning as a

leader, the press may simply follow. Numerous content analyses have assumed a follower role rather than a leader role for the mass media regarding media messages as a reflection of the public view.

A first step in testing the causal direction has been taken by Tipton et al. (1974), who examined the fit between personal agendas and massmedia coverage of the Kentucky gubernatorial election and the Lexington mayoral election. Using cross-lagged correlations, Tipton found strong relationships between media coverage and personal agendas both synchronously and across time, expecially when the analysis was based on newspaper agendas.

Both lagged correlations, "Media at time one with Voters at time two" and "Voters at time one with Media at time two" exceeded the baseline for statistical significance. While use of TV agendas generally yielded null results, both newspaper data and controls for the level of political interest of the respondent yielded similar, but ambivalent results.

Since neither the agenda-setting view nor the view that the press simply reflects the public mind prevailed in the Kentucky study, other alternative explanations must be considered. Little is known about the time lags involved in learning from media (or time lags involved in feedback loops, to honor the other point of view), so Tipton may have used inappropriate time lags in computing his correlations. How long does it take for a political issue to be recognized? And disseminated by the media/learned by the audience? In any event Tipton has indicated the problems that await analysts probing for causal evidence on agenda-setting.

Learning from Mass Communication

To assert an agenda-setting function for mass communication is of course to assert that individuals learn from the mass media, particularly that they learn an agenda of issues or a cognitive map of the world around them. We can begin by identifying the various clusters of variables that are relevant to this learning process. What kinds of factors affect the learning of saliences?

Message Attributes

> In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position.

These lead sentences from the editor's summary of the McCombs and Shaw study published in Public Opinion Quarterly (1972, p. 176) emphasize two key aspects of agenda-setting.

The first is selection/nonselection of news items. We might call this the 0/1 situation. This basic notion of agenda-setting is a truism. If the media tell us nothing about a topic, in most cases it cannot exist on our personal agendas. Only items communicated by the media or another source can appear on personal agendas. In this simple 0/1 situation there necessarily is significant linkage between media and personal agendas, especially for items outside the immediate environment. But the concept of agenda-setting urges a more detailed

view: o/1/2 ..., namely that among the items transmitted by the media, the same basic distinctions as to salience will be transferred from the media agenda to the individual's agenda. More simply it amounts to this: we judge as important what the media judge as important.

It really is this bolder hypothesis emphasized in the abstract just quoted. Not merely the appearance or non-appearance of the message is important in agenda-setting, though that certainly is. But such characteristics as display and position — page one versus inside, top of the page versus bottom, large headline versus small headline — and sheer length are key attributes of the stimulus presented to the audience. Also, following the basic assumption of quantitative content analysis, the sheer frequency of appearance of the stimulus is an important aspect of the learning process.

Even the medium itself, the technology used to transmit the message to the audience, has some effect on the learning process. McLuhan's assertion that the medium is the message reflects renewed interest in the grammar of mass communication technology in recent years (Katz et al., 1973-1974). Preliminary evidence suggests agendas are best learned from newspapers. This might be a function of the medium per se — perhaps it simply is easier to comprehend and learn news items in print — or a function of the content typical to each medium — TV concentrates on the headlines and major stories while the newspaper has more room on its agenda for minor items. In any event the agenda-setting function of mass communication offers a useful context for organizing the fragmented literature

on the grammar of mass communication technology.

Audience Attributes — The Learning Situation

Mass communication can be compared to a classroom where the students continually come and go and in which all kinds of information are constantly swirling around. We already know that the greater the amount of media exposure, in general, the stronger are the correlations between media and audience agendas. In learning terms, the more practice, the better the learning. But the quality of this practice also must be considered. An item in the newspaper can be skimmed or read carefully. One can view a TV newscast attentively or half listen while playing with the children.

How long does it take for new items to be learned and to be placed high on a personal agenda? Fleeting exposure — a single learning trial — undoubtedly is insufficient unless the event is enormously important. But how many trials? Spaced how? What does the learning curve for agenda items look like? What is the time lag between media presentation and appearance of an item on personal agendas?

Unfortunately, it is not as easy to untangle the answers to these questions about learning in the mass communication classroom as it is to measure learning in the psychological laboratory. Laboratory research can help sort out basic variables, but remember that learning from a mass communication is not a matter of repeated exposure to the same or similar stimuli presented in the same setting. Most audience members have several media "teachers." There is of

course great redundancy, but not perfect overlap.

The overall pattern of media use must be considered. When an individual uses several news sources, does his agenda resemble a composite of all the sources? Or, as just suggested a moment ago, is one teacher more powerful than another? How do the messages of the various media push and pull — reinforce and conflict — with each other?

And where does interpersonal communication fit in? Topics of conversation often come from the mass media. Does this interpersonal discussion reinforce the teachings of the media? Or does anticipatory coorientation play a role here? Do powerful group norms override the teaching of the media and shape their own agenda?

Audience Attributes — Personal Characteristics

Newscasts and other mass communication messages are not simple stimuli displayed before an audience. Rather, media content is a stimulus package, composed of dozens of components at several levels of meaning. Out of this welter of stimuli which ones are actually selected by the audience? Agenda-setting asserts that the salience of an item is one of the key attributes acquired from the mass media. Greater attention to the psychology of attention would enhance our understanding of what is learned from mass communication. How does the audience sort out the complex stimulus package presented by the media? Which aspects of this stimulus package are absorbed and learned?

One psychological concept which begins to explain each individual's

focus of attention is need for orientation (McCombs, 1967). Postulating an inherent curiousity about the surrounding environment, need for orientation is the cognitive equivalent of "nature abhors a vacuum." Lippmann's pseudo-environment and Lewin's life-space are attempts to explain the cognitive maps of the world which we construct to fill vacuums.

Communication, ranging from exposure to simple sensory stimulation to complex analyses of ideas in print, is the key to maintaining these maps. To sense a vacuum is to sense a need for orientation which can lead to purposeful exposure in the media classroom.

One study has shown that the greater the need for orientation, the greater the amount of exposure to political mass communication. And the greater the need for orientation, the closer the match between voters' agendas and the agendas of the mass media (McCombs and Weaver, 1973). More recently Cole (1974) has examined need for orientation in a broader context — surveillance of the environment. Here again he found that need for orientation sharply discriminated use of newspapers, TV, and news magazines.

Types of Issues

The research on agenda-setting to date has concentrated on public issues with little distinction among different types of issues. Agendas usually have been considered solely in terms of the "major" issues of the moment regardless of content. But public issues, obviously, can be arrayed along numerous dimensions: local versus national, the personally-close versus the distant, emotional versus

abstract, or simply sorted according to the subject.

It is not likely that the agenda-setting function of the mass media is concerned equally with all types of issues ceteris paribus. The salience of some types of issues on personal agendas are likely to show significant media influence while others show little or no such influence. Furthermore, interactions between types of issues and other contingent conditions — such as the learning process — are highly likely.

All this suggests future agenda-setting research must move away from unidimensional issue categories and begin to explore agenda-setting effects on the elements of multi-dimensional issue typologies. This kind of research, like the exploration of other contingent conditions, merges the effects orientation of communication science with the "uses-and-gratifications" approach. Such research begins to specify exactly what kinds of uses and gratifications are obtained from mass communications information.

Even a cursory examination of the ebb and flow of different public opinion items in our recent history reveals great variation in the natural history of issues. Public concern over Vietnam built slowly over many years. Watergate took over six months to establish itself as a matter of great concern (Weaver and Spellman, 1974). Other issues like the energy crisis appear quite quickly on agendas. Distinctions among various types of issues is apt to be key in spelling out the agenda-setting function of the mass media.

Conceptualization and Measurement of Agendas

While there is general agreement among researchers examining the agenda-setting function of the mass media about the appropriate content analysis procedures for measuring media agendas, there is little consensus about the measurement of personal agendas among voters, students, and other populations.

At least five different data collection techniques have been used to obtain measures of personal agendas. Open-ended questions have frequently been employed, appearing in the series of studies by McCombs and Shaw (1972, 1973) and also in Tipton et al. (1974). The major argument in favor of open-ended questions to elicit data on the importance of issues rests on their relative unobtrusiveness. The respondent is free to name any issue or topic that comes to mind. There are, however, some hints in the data collected to date that even open-ended questions are subject to some degree of set. For example, inclusion of the term "public opinion," "government," or similar wordings seem to limit the number of highly personal, idiosyncratic responses. Nevertheless, the open-ended question does avoid having the researcher suggest an explicit agenda for ratification by the respondent.

At the same time, the open-ended question reduces the comparability of responses across subjects. Since this is the case, there have been a number of attempts to obtain data from each respondent across a large range of issues. Common to all these data-collection procedures is the necessity for the researcher to submit a list of issues to the respondent. McLeod et al. (in press) asked respondents to

rank-order a list of six issues. In a 1972 Durham study respondents were asked to rate each issue as "Very important," "Somewhat important," or "Not at all important." (See McCombs, 1973). A 1972 Syracuse study used seven-point scales to obtain respondents' ratings on the importance of various issues (McClure and Patterson, 1974). A 1972 Charlotte study used paired-comparison scaling to obtain respondents' ratings on the issues (McCombs, 1973).

And there is also a major conceptual issue to be considered aside from the methodology of agenda measures. The influence process hypothesized in the agenda-setting function of the press can be conceptualized in either intra-personal or inter-personal terms. While most of the work to date has used intra-personal measures of issue salience, McLeod et al. (in press) point out the need for consideration of agenda-setting in interpersonal terms.

> The agenda setting hypothesis asserts the media exert influence through the choice of certain issues for emphasis in news presentations and editorial comment as well as the omission of other issues. While there is little conflict regarding the thrust of this assertion in the literature, there is some question as to the proper indicant of influence. In other words, the dependent variable for the hypothesis has varied, stemming, perhaps, from the diverse origins of the concept.
>
> . . . .
>
> In the McCombs and associates' operationaliza-

> tions the dependent influence variables are intrapersonal. Yet the notion of the media setting the agenda for its audience seems to allow for a more general definition involving community of interpersonal interaction. A proper operationalization of this latter concept could involve asking respondents both what they talk about with other members of the community and what issues other community members are raising with them.

Ultimately, of course, decisions on the "proper" operationalizing of agenda measures in inter-personal or intra-personal terms will depend on the theoretical context of the research. While both views are possible, one eventually is likely to prove empirically more fruitful than the other. Some initial comparisons of intra-personal and inter-personal agendas of public issues have been reported by McCombs (1974), drawing on a methodological survey of 302 Syracuse University male sophomores in fall 1973. At the aggregate level, either a simple projective device or more specific conceptualization of agenda measures in intra-personal or inter-personal terms seems to yield little difference in the data generated in this study. But when the individual is the unit of analysis, differences in the conceptualization of the question put to respondents make a considerable difference. In an intra-personal context there is only 48.1% overlap with the general open-ended question. But when an inter-personal context is specified there is 61.5% overlap in the responses.

When respondents were asked which source of information they found most useful for the issue they had named, striking differences resulted from the two contexts. For intra-personal items, TV and newspapers each dominate on about half the issues. But in an inter-personal context TV clearly dominates all but one issue. One could speculate on the appropriateness of each type of information (TV news style and content versus newspaper style and content) for conversations versus personal reflection. But that is a future point of inquiry.

Finally we see that a shift in the frame of reference produces differences in the reasons cited for placing an item at the top of the agenda. In an intra-personal context, respondents cite direct, personal effects. In an inter-personal context, explicit references are made to agenda-setting. Respondents explain frequent discussion of an issue in terms of its frequent appearance in the news. They apparently feel that what is discussed a lot on the media will be discussed a lot among their friends. Perhaps this results in a self-fulfilling prophecy. If so, it certainly does not lessen the agenda-setting power of the media.

Extending the Domain

Nearly all agenda-setting research to date has examined political issues and topics routinely measured in public opinion polls. But the concept of agenda-setting should not be restricted to a political

domain. Or limited to the news content of the mass media. Earlier, for example, we noted the implications of agenda-setting for children learning from TV programs. Advertising messages also are a fruitful area for agenda-setting research.

New Level of Analysis

The previous discussion of stereotyping in terms of agenda-setting highlights an important shift in level of analysis. The agendas studied to date have been agendas of objects. But in describing these objects the media also — either by chance or by the traditions of journalism and mass communication — manipulate the salience of the attributes of these objects. Every phase, every attribute of each public issue or whatever object is being described is not described with equal emphasis. Not only objects, but also their attributes, are given differential attention. To some degree agenda-setting, the manipulation of saliences, extends to attributes as well as objects.

Krugman (1965) has theorized that the important effects of mass media advertising result from the manipulations of attribute salience (agenda-setting), not from attitude change. His theory also specifies level of audience involvement as a key contingent condition. Under conditions of low involvement — typical of most media use situations — "... one might look for gradual shifts in perceptual structure, aided by repetition, activated by behavioral-choice situations, and <u>followed</u> at some time by attitude change." In short, the reordering of personal agendas by the media causes changes in

consumer behavior in the marketplace. His theory argues: we learn; we behave in response to that learning; we develop supporting attitudes — in that time order.

A profitable re-examination of gatekeeping and news values in journalism could well consider the agenda-setting function of the mass media both at the level of objects — topics and themes — and of attributes — characteristics and facets of these topics and themes. Consideration of agenda-setting at both levels — objects and attributes — also suggests framing hypothese amenable to field and laboratory experiments as well as survey research.

Implications of Agenda-setting

If a pun be permitted, political issues have become more salient as key variables in voter behavior in recent years. The importance of party identification, long the dominant variable in voter analysis, has been reduced. This stems from both a conceptual rethinking of voter behavior and from an empirical trend. One scholar found that the strength of the correlation between party identification and candidate choice showed a monotonic decline over recent presidential elections. (See Burnham, 1969).

The 1968 Comparative State Election Project (CSEP), conducted by the Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina, gave issues a greater conceptual role in their analysis than had the University of Michigan Survey Research Center in earlier studies. The CSEP particularly emphasized the "distance" between each voter's attitude and the position of each presidential

candidate. In the CSEP analyses, both for state voter cohorts and nationally, issue proximity was a more powerful predictor than party identification.

While attempts to weight the issues for personal salience to the voter failed to enhance their predictive strength, Beardsley (1973, p. 43) feels that this is a methodological artifact.

> The failure of salience weights to add to the explanatory power of these policy-issue variables is not easy to explain. We suspect that the most important reasons are the following: (1) Despite the fact that the questionnaire salience items asked "How important to you is the question of _____?" (italics in the original), it is likely that many of our respondents interpreted the question as if it read, "How much publicity did the issue of _____ generate during the campaign?" (2) Many of the respondents may have expressed intensity through their location of themselves and the candidates on the card-sort continuum, thus rendering the salience weights superfluous. For example, a respondent may have expressed an intense issue predisposition by "exaggerating" his relative proximity to his preferred candidate on that issue.

While from a journalistic perspective, agenda-setting can be conceived simply as the transmission of news values and be self-contained

as a focal point for research, agenda-setting as a concept in communication research should be linked to other social behaviors. Does the differential attention of the news media to public issues in part perpetuate itself by guiding subsequent information-seeking behavior? Does the ebb and flow of different issues on the public agenda influence voter turnout in elections? Here again different types of issues must be considered. If citizens respond, at least in part, to their own simple self-interest at the polls, then an agneda laden with "personal" rather than "remote" or "abstract" issues may stimulate turnout.

There is also the possibility that manipulation of the agenda by the mass media may on occasion influence the direction of an election. Issues sometimes clearly work to the advantage of one political party or candidate. The salience of Korea and corruption in the federal government worked against the incumbent Democratic Party in 1952 and the Republicans regained the White House after a hiatus of twenty years. One major campaign technique reported in Professional Public Relations and Political Power (Kelley, 1956) is nothing more than increasing the salience of an issue that works to an incumbent's disadvantage.

Inherent in the very notion of agenda-setting is one key behavioral implication: the mass media influence the topics of discussion among individuals. Consideration of inter-personal agendas is consideration of a key behavioral result of agenda-setting.

Finally, to come full circle and recall the classic Cohen

description of agenda-setting, the major effect of agenda-setting is to determine the structure of public opinion-— what people have opinions about. Understanding what people think they should have opinions about and therefore do have opinions about is a major aspect of study of political behavior and public communication. Agenda-setting provides a major theoretical point of view in eventually helping link public information and political behavior and public thought in other areas of our public life.

IV. New Data on Agenda-Setting

A. The Learning Situation

Several small-scale studies conducted by McCombs, Shaw and their colleagues in North Carolina between the 1968 and 1972 Presidential elections indicated a positive relationship between amount of exposure to a news medium and the level of agreement with its agenda of public issues. In general, the greater the amount of media exposure, the stronger the correlations between media and audience agendas.

The study reported here* is a replication of this hypothesis using a larger-scale data set with several major extensions and additions.

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* Conducted by Federico I. Agnir as a term project in McCombs' Communication 747.

— Following McLeod et al. (in press) and McCombs (1974), personal agendas were conceptualized in both intra-personal and inter-personal terms. Previous research on this hypothesis had used only an intra-personal measure of voters' agendas.

— The comparisons of the audience and media agendas were made in two different ways. First, in line with the earlier work in North Carolina rank-order correlations (Spearman's rho) summarized the agreement between the media agenda and audience agenda. This assumes the 0/1/2 ... concept of agenda-setting previously discussed.

But there is another possibility intermediate between the 0/1/2 ... conceptualization and the simple 0/1 view of agenda-setting. Heavy media emphasis on one or two issues may move them onto individual agendas. But the minor issues appearing in the media may not reach threshold for individual agendas. In short, media emphasis may be important, but the bold assertion that the exact rank-ordering of the media is reproduced largely intact on personal agendas simply may not be true. Only the major saliences of the media may be transferred to audience agendas.

Therefore, a second comparison was made, noting how frequently the major issues in the press were reproduced on personal agendas. At the time of the Syracuse Sophomore Survey — the data used here — the two dominant issues were the Middle East war and Watergate. This second comparison centers on how many respondents selected either of these issues above all others. The concept of agenda-

setting would lead one to expect a higher proportion of respondents to select the Middle East or Watergate as their most important issue among those sub-groups most highly exposed to the news media.

In short, this study of the relationship between the degree of agenda-setting influence and amount of exposure to mass communication is an attempt to replicate this basic hypothesis using two different measures of issue salience and two different conceptualizations of personal agendas.

In addition, the study provides some data on agenda-setting from a non-campaign period. Nearly all the findings now in the literature are based on surveys conducted during political campaigns. This study also utilizes data based on two quite different types of major issues: Watergate, a slow rising issue of long duration; and the Middle East war, a rapidly rising issue of short duration in the public mind.

Data Bases

Audience data for this study were taken from the Syracuse Sophomore Survey conducted during the fall of 1973. Designed basically as a methodological study, respondents were limited to a single sex (male) and year in school (sophomore) in order to limit the variance in personal agendas due to demographic and situational factors. Interviews were completed with 302 respondents.

Since the majority (N=164) designated the New York Times as their principal newspaper source of political information, the

parallel week's issues of the New York Times were content analyzed. This content analysis was based both on an analysis carried out by two graduate communication courses and, following the strategy of Funkhouser (1973), an item count taken from the New York Times Index. Funkhouser expressed some doubt about relying on indexes for content analysis data, noting that one is at the mercy of professional indexers and also that multiple listings of individual articles under two or more headings risk the possibility of inflated scores.

The dual approach here yields data on these risks. Comparison of the media agendas generated by each method yielded a Pearson product moment correlation of +.95, a highly satisfactory level of reliability. Use of prepared indices, such as the New York Times Index, seems to be both highly efficient and reliable.

Both the New York Times agenda and student sub-group agendas were constructed in terms of five issues: Watergate, Middle East war, new Vice-President, rising prices, and energy-environment problems.

Findings

In setting up the data for analysis sub-groups were defined both in terms of frequency of exposure to the media and whether the New York Times was their major news source. This latter variable functions as a control.

Examining the four sub-groups in Table 1 we see the importance of this control. As expected, in all four comparisons New York

Table 1

Levels of Agreement (Pearson's Rho) with the Newspaper Agenda of National Issues by Frequency of Exposure to Newspapers

A. Based on intra-personal agenda

	New York Times Agenda	
	NYT Readers	Non-NYT readers
Frequent	+ .62 (N = 65)	+ .38 (N = 49)
Infrequent	+ .82 (N = 44)	+ .77 (N = 81)

B. Based on inter-personal agenda

Frequent	+ .86 (N = 73)	+ .67 (N = 58)
Infrequent	+ .74 (N = 53)	+ .36 (N = 102)

Times readers show greater agreement with the agenda of the Times than do non-NYT readers.

However, the major hypothesis under consideration — greater agreement with the media agenda among more frequent readers — holds only for the inter-personal agenda. Frequent readers of the New York Times do talk more about the subjects emphasized in the Times than do less frequent readers.

Table 2 affords a replication of the previous analysis, using a different measure of agreement. Here, we see the proportion of respondents in each sub-group whose top issue was in agreement with the New York Times' top issues (Watergate or the Middle East). Here the hypothesized relationship between agenda-setting influence and frequency of exposure is clearly supported among NYT readers both in terms of inter-personal and intra-personal agendas.

In Tables 3 and 4 the exposure hypothesis is again tested, but now only for NYT readers and with a control introduced for amount of television exposure. Does exposure to a (partially) competing agenda reduce the influence of the newspaper? Or, since there is some degree of overlap between television and newspaper agendas, does the conjunction of heavy exposure reinforce learning the newspaper agenda? For newspaper exposure — the principal variable since the comparison is with the New York Times agenda — the hypothesis is supported for inter-personal agendas, but not for intra-personal agendas. Systematic comparison of the effects of TV — holding constant the level of newspaper exposure — shows

Table 2

Respondents in Agreement with Newspaper's Major Issues by Frequency of Exposure to Newspapers

A. Based on intra-personal agenda

	NYT Readers	Non-NYT Readers
Frequent	68.6%	48.4%
Infrequent	51.8%	55.1%

B. Based on inter-personal agenda

Frequent	97.3%	77.8%
Infrequent	80.0%	65.4%

Note: Every entry represents the percentage in that cell of respondents who indicated Watergate or Middle East as the most important issue, in agreement with the New York Times' top two issues.

Table 3

Level of Agreement (Pearson's Rho) with the Newspaper Agenda of National Issues by Frequency of Exposure to Newspapers and Frequency of Exposure to Television

A. Based on intra-personal agenda

	New York Times Agenda	
	TV Exposure	
	Frequent	Infrequent
Newspaper Exposure		
Frequent	+ .77 (N = 43)	+ .76 (N = 31)
Infrequent	+ .77 (N = 14)	+ .63 (N = 29)

B. Based on inter-personal agenda

Frequent	+. 94 (N = 37)	+ .99 (N = 31)
Infrequent	+ .88 (N = 24)	+ .64 (N = 37)

Table 4

Respondents in Agreement with Newspapers' Major Issues by Frequency of Exposure to Newspapers and Frequency of Exposure to Television

A. Based on intra-personal agenda

	TV Exposure	
	Frequent	Infrequent
Newspaper Exposure		
Frequent	74.3%	84.4%
Infrequent	68.8%	43.7%

B. Based on inter-personal agenda

Frequent	99.3%	97.3%
Infrequent	87.6%	76.7%

Note: (Same as Table 2)

no main effect for TV.

Replication of the analysis in Table 4 yields very striking support for the newspaper exposure hypothesis in all four comparisons. Again, there is no evidence of any main effect attributable to amount of television exposure.

To sum up —

— Strong evidence supports the concept of agenda-setting. Frequent users of a medium show stronger evidence of influence than do infrequent users. This finding seems clearly required to sustain the concept of agenda-setting. Note, however, that non-users would not be expected to show zero correlations. While the news media do not agree perfectly on the day's agenda, there is some consensus on what the important topics are.

But the more an audience are exposed to a medium the more they tend to reflect its agenda. The greater the exposure, the better the agenda is learned.

— Where the bolder version of agenda-setting is asserted, the 0/1/2 ... version, where r's are the appropriate measure of agreement, the concept of agenda-setting holds here only for the inter-personal agendas.

— For the modified version of agenda-setting — the media's top issues become the people's top issues, but the rank-orderings of the media are not transferred intact to personal agendas — the concept of agenda-setting (now measured by the percentage of agreement) holds both for inter-personal and intra-personal agendas.

— Television news seems to have little impact, positive or negative, on the agenda-setting influence of the newspaper. There is now an intriguing scatter of findings suggesting greater agenda-setting influence from newspapers than from television.

B. Behavioral Implications

Commercial flying is generally considered far more dangerous than driving by car as a method of traveling. Poelker (1968) found that even though the number of fatalities per 100,000,000 passenger-miles was 68% lower for commercial airlines than for automobiles, the public still considered air travel more dangerous by a proportion of 2 to 1.

Dabbs, Helmreich, and Furn (1972) exposed a random sample of students to a description of an accident irrelevant to either flying or driving. The group had been pretested for willingness to either fly in a commercial plane or drive to a destination. After the accident description, the group again was offered the same alternative, but now commercial flying was indicated by means of statistics to be safer than driving. Nevertheless, most subjects chose to travel by land.

This fear of flying recently has been augmented by the danger of skyjacking. (Rowan, 1970, and Cooper, Fein, Washburn, and Boltwood, 1971)

It seems likely that this general fear of flying among the public is made especially salient either when there are crashes

with large numbers of fatalities or when a hijacker takes over an airborne plane. This is a rich area for agenda-setting research because it is principally, if not solely, through the media that one learns of crashes and skyjackings. It is the media that periodically make the dangers of flying especially salient.

There are two obvious behavioral reactions to a salient fear of flying: don't fly, stay at home; or, if you do fly, buy more insurance. These two hypothesized behavioral outcomes of a salient fear of flying are nicely complementary. A salient fear of flying — concern over air crashes or skyjackings high on the personal agenda — should, on the one hand, lead to a decrease in ticket sales and, on the other hand, to an increase in insurance sales.*

Finally, note that this study also extends agenda-setting beyond traditional public opinion/political issues, an important extension urged previously in this paper.

Methodology

First, the volume of tickets sold during weeks in which there were no accidents or skyjackings was compared with the volume of tickets sold during weeks in which there were. This comparison was made on five years of ticket sales between 1969 and 1973. The data was obtained from a major airline's record of weekly sales of

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*This study was conducted by Alexander Bloj in McCombs' Communication 606 course.

tickets at a large northeastern city.

A week was considered "high salience" for this study if it met these criteria:

— At least two consecutive days of national coverage by the media (represented by the New York Times in this study, accident dates were compiled from the NYT indexes).

— At least 10 fatalities (except for skyjackings).

— In the case of skyjackings, only those occasions in which the skyjacker had control of the plane while airborne.

As a replication and complementary set of evidences, the number of flight insurance policies sold during "low salience" weeks was compared with the number of policies sold during "high salience" weeks. This comparison was made on airport life insurance sales from 1969 through 1973. The data was obtained from a major insurance company's records at the same northeastern airport.

Findings

The results presented in Table 5 show that, except for years 1970 and 1971, there is a significant difference between sales level in high and low salience weeks for both airplane tickets and life insurance policies.

Taking these results cumulatively across all five years we see that:

— The average number of tickets sold in high salience weeks is significantly lower ($t = 1.95$, $p < .05$, one-tail) than the

Table 5

Year	Low Salience Weeks	High Salience Weeks	Accidents/ Skyjackings
1969	30	22	30
1970	38	14	19
1971	36	16	16
1972	42	10	18
1973	40	12	17

	Mean Ticket Sales		Mean Insurance Sales	
Year	Low Salience Weeks	High Salience Weeks	Low Salience Weeks	High Salience Weeks
1969	4493	4030*	52	56*
1970	4798	4302	58	63
1971	5014	4601	60	64
1972	5412	4789*	63	69*
1973	5667	5021*	68	74*

* $p < .05$, one-tail

number of tickets sold in low salience weeks.

— However, the difference in the number of life insurance policies sold between high and low salience weeks is not significant.

This study, based on available aggregate data, suggests a direct behavioral outcome from press attention to plane crashes and skyjackings. In the aggregate, high salience of the dangers of flying — resulting from press coverage — seems to deter people from flying and encourage them to buy more insurance if they do fly. In this area the agenda-setting function of the press appears to have immediate behavioral concomitants.

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